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ABSTRACT

Graduate programs in educational administration often do not accurately portray the realities of the job. This paper describes an approach by which administrators and those in training interviewed experienced educational administrators and then used the interview transcripts to write a story of leadership. Ten administrators were interviewed. The stories described the personal biographies and life experiences of administrators. The stories also illustrated some of the explicit rules that administrators used to manage problems as well as their implicit assumptions that were embedded in practice. There is a need for training programs to bridge the gap between theory and practice by drawing from communities of practitioners. Two tables are included. (Contains 39 references.) (Author/LMI)

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BUILDING EXPERTISE IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP BY WRITING AND REFLECTING ON STORIES OF PRACTICE

by

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BUILDING EXPERTISE IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP BY WRITING AND REFLECTING ON STORIES OF PRACTICE

ABSTRACT

The basic approach described in this article was for novice and in-training administrators to interview experienced educational administrators and then, to use these transcripts to write a story of leadership. These stories described the personal biography and life experiences of experienced administrators. The stories provided basic assumptions and details about how administrators performed in a specific situations and circumstances. The stories illustrated some of the explicit rules used by administrators to manage problems as well as the more tacit knowledge and assumptions embedded in practice.

BUILDING EXPERTISE IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP BY WRITING AND REFLECTING ON STORIES OF PRACTICE

Leaders fashion stories. . . It is important that a leader be a good storyteller.
— Howard Gardner in Leading Minds (1995)

Introduction

The goal of this paper is to explore the learning that occurs when novices write and reflect on experienced administrators' biographies and stories of practice. The professional literature points to the need for training programs to bridge the gap between theory and practice by drawing from communities of practitioners. One of the common complaints about university programs is a disregard for the realities of the job. Graduates remember their training with some fondness, but often say it is not particularly relevant to the work they perform. Graduate programs in administration run special risks because the administrator's world is different than the university culture. While students in university classrooms are largely subordinate, those in leadership positions are superordinate; while university curricula prescribe a careful deliberation and weighing of evidence, real school settings demand immediate response to emergencies, small and large, with little time for deliberation; while the university places most value on the written form, practice demands face-to-face interactions and immediate solutions to problems (Murphy , 1990; Milstein, 1990).

Suggestions for a more reflective practitioner point to the importance of blending theory and practice. Professional schools must not only prepare novices to enter a field or workplace, but also must insure that the beginner will learn from experience (and mistakes) on the way to achieving expert status. Novices often feel clumsy, unsure of themselves, and need help in how

to think about problems of practice, and how to activate prior knowledge. One strategy being proposed is to develop training in cooperation with the workplace (e.g., school and district) based on joint identification of problems and approaches (Conway & Jacobson, 1990; Murphy, 1990; Hallinger, Leithwood, & Murphy, 1993; Thomson, 1993; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1993; 1995). A related strategy is to focus on the cognitive strategies used by experts. In the educational leadership area, this research has attempted to makes explicit the thinking and problem-solving skills of school leaders (Hallinger, Leithwood, & Murphy, 1993; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1993; 1995).

A Rationale for Writing Stories of Practice

The are many reasons for writing stories of practice. Stories give busy leaders a reason to attend to the smaller dramas that shape people's lives. Stories provide a way to explore how people think and act. A prerequisite for seeing the value of others' perspectives, is an awareness of self. University programs for school leaders must therefore provide an opportunity to inquire more deeply into oneself, and oneself engaged in action with others (Bennis, 1989; Terry, 1993).

Stories and cases enhance understanding and growth in professional practice (Barone, 1990; 1992; Baum, 1991; Greenwood, 1991; Clandinin and Connelly, 1991; Schön, 1991; Carter, 1993; Richardson, 1994; Leithwood and Steinbach, 1995). Issues related to school culture, personal relations, values and beliefs, rituals and myths, take on more meaning as they are presented in stories of practice. These issues are sometimes overlooked or ignored in the rush of daily experience and in the recitation of abstract principles. They allow beginners to consider and inspect the informal or tacit systems which exist side-by-side with the formal manifest systems operating in schools and organizations. Novices would gain from richer descriptions of

the processes by which classify ambiguous and large amounts of information. How do leaders view and subsequently act upon problems that contain only partial information, judgments, and conflicting expectations by the individuals and organizations involved?

Stories provided an opportunity for practicing administrators to share their experiences. Many people enjoy sharing personal and professional experiences, particularly with someone who is less experienced. Beginners have the opportunity to develop new relationships and find new empathies in old relationships.

Stories emphasize the value of both theory and practice, experience and reflection. They increase the likelihood of being successful in teaching practitioner based skills. Research suggests that novices welcome the challenge of confronting real school issues (Short & Rinehart ,1993; Hart, 1993). Stories provide one format to allow students to move from the superficial to deeper issues embedded in practice; shared exploration of stories assists building of communities of learners whose members learn from one another. Story creation and discussion have multiplier effects in which people talk through issues in the cases long after the formal presentation is completed. Further, stories lead to new understandings of how expertise is gained in the real world by linking the study of educational leadership to professional practice communities. Richardson (1994) contrasts the goals of traditional research and narrative approaches. In traditional studies, the researcher draws inferences from a study and expects the practitioner to apply it. The practitioner is required to draw inferences from a research study but modifies those inferences based on his or her domain of application. On the other hand, in a narrative, the practitioner draws inferences based on his or her own experiences and applies them in context.

Situating learning in the stories of administrative practice is likely to make the new knowledge more meaningful and usable (Hallinger, Leithwood, & Murphy, 1993; Leithwood and Steinbach, 1995). The importance of prior knowledge also changes. Prior knowledge is part of the weighing that goes on in problem solving activity rather than the sole determiner of its course of action. Prior knowledge may determine more how leaders think about a problem or situation than how they come up with a solution. If as others have argued, expertise is a function of the complexity of the network of relationships among existing knowledge structures and the ability to control the process of flexibly bringing it to bear in new situations with variations, then stories may provide a more meaningful way to access knowledge and apply it.

Leaders acquire many skills as they move from novice to expert. Among many other things, expert leaders recognize the perspectives of others, accommodate how others learn and grow, understanding how hierarchy filters information, anticipate problems, prioritize relevant detail, and are comfortable with ambiguity. Reflection and self-evaluation are habits of the mind which allow one to learn from experience. Knowledge acquired through a combination of theory and practice promotes the externalizing of expert processes that are normally performed internally.

What the Story Offers

The story is a model for examining the underlying experiences of the story teller, and the filters through which one views professional practice. Reflecting on the story of practice leads to greater understanding of professional motives and workplace practices. Gardner (1995) views the story as basic human cognitive form. The creation and articulation of stories makes up a basic part of understanding leadership, one which connects reason and emotion. He says that

leaders ultimately create stories of ***identify***, stories which help others answer the question of who we are, where we come from, and where we are headed. Gardner uses story in broad sense, as narratives in the linguistic sphere, and as invited accounts in any symbol system ranging from physics to dance.

Gardner proposes a taxonomy of stories: Three broad categories of stories to be told: (1) Stories about the self; (2) Stories about the group; (3) Stories about meaning and values. Stories are most effective when they appeal to need to know things (understanding) and feeling of belonging (or security). Gardner (1995) uses terms *stories* and *narrative* rather than themes or messages to focus more on the *dynamic perspective* not just headline or snapshot but a drama that unfolds over time. These are stories in which leaders and followers are principal characters or heroes. Stories are stories of identity, and the leaders who succeed are able to convey a new version of an old story or given group's story or identity. Leaders use every resource, linguistic and nonlinguistic, to attempt to communicate to others, a particular view, a clear vision of life. The story is effective in that it *fits*— the story makes sense to audience members, at a particular time, about where they have been and where they would like to go.

Schön (1991) provides examples of practices in classrooms and schools, city planning departments, university departments, non-profit health organizations, worker cooperatives, and in the research environment itself. Each story yields new insights on the part of story writer concerning professional practice. He proposes that there are different types of stories of practice. Stories may be *manifest stories* as they present a point and try to explain how something operates. Some stories are *meta-stories*, in that they raise basic concepts or viewpoints of how to consider experience from a "self-story" perspective. Many stories contain causal explanations.

These stories have an inherent drama which builds toward causal explanations of behaviors and end with an illumination that would otherwise remain mysterious. *Underlying stories* look at some of the interpersonal and relationships within the stories. The reader gets to see some of the "hidden parts of the iceberg", in the ways people participate in organizations to perform tasks and to grow personally. The goal of all stories is to connect the explicit, formal, symbolic presentations of knowledge and the practical know-how found in individuals' effective actions. This connects the privileged discourse of universities with the smart hands of experience. Effective education and training of leaders moves back and forth between the two (Schön, 1991, pp. 342-345).

Storytelling is a fundamental means of personal and social growth (Clandinin and Connelly, 1991). Seeing and describing stories in the everyday actions of others, teachers, students, administrators is an educational experience. Stories allow one to look at the experiential "whole" not component parts. By doubting, then deliberating, and reflecting upon its meanings, theory and practice are brought closer together. Clandinin and Connelly (1991) use the story of a school principal and the importance of his image of school as a community to understand his administrative actions. In the story, school is presented as a *personal community* in the sense that it is a place where bonds are personal. The listener hears the importance of a personal image of community in his work. When the principal persuades the teachers to cancel a planned school celebration and re-schedule it as part of a larger community festival, the authors suggest that one could interpret this to be the actions of a community spirited principal. Clandinin and Connelly (1991) also point to a counter story, one of administrative hegemony, that of an authoritarian principal telling his faculty when, where, and how to celebrate the end of

the year. How one puts together one's own interpretation of a story with the story tellers view? The hoped for recognition is that there is perhaps more than one true story of practice.

Stories tell us about life as seen from the inside (Mattingly, 1991). They draw and evoke empathetic identification among listeners. There is a strongly held moralizing effect of stories with the plot of the story, a moral plot that provides meaning to particular events. The moral of the story is its moral argument. Analyzing stories allows a moral investigation of the practical consequences of beliefs and theories that are otherwise decontextualized abstractions. A related benefit of stories is that they illustrate the "practical theories," the deeply held images and moral principles that guide actions. Storytelling is a natural way we represent experiences to ourselves; it is also a natural way of learning from experience which can be used self-consciously, as a learning tool. Even when people can't tell you what they did or why, they may be able to give voice with stories. If leaders are more aware of the beliefs and assumptions underlying their actions, they are more likely to recognize when their beliefs are unfounded or when their theories lead to consequences they did not want or could not explicitly espouse.

The story, as a form of discourse, shapes the content of what it narrates (Schön, 1991). Written reports are usually formal. They examine issues in isolation from behind-the-scenes events, and though the sense of coherence is greater in a formal report, it is devoid of context. People are absent. Narrative accounts (stories) focus on people in context; how people actually do things and the changes that result. Motives and intentions of actors are an important part of the story.

Hirschhorn (1991) suggests that good stories:

- are thematically linked;

- are coherent and contradictions resolved by the end;
- are plausible, not vague, cooked up, but attached to commonly held belief;
- lead to some genuine new learning which apparently links contradictory phenomena.

Stories enable professionals to learn about the importance of their own stories and the basically interpretive nature of their work. This empowers teacher leaders and administrators to see how the personal and professional are connected in stories of practice that are shared. It allows them to examine the "schooling experience" of children, other teachers, administrators, and parents and helps them to treat school phenomenologically, as a meaningful experience in the life of another person. By telling and listening to stories, practitioners are able to access the value beliefs of their profession.

Stories also require interpretation and there are dangers in taking stories too seriously. It sometimes takes a little savvy to understand what is "going on" when listening to locker room stories of sexual exploits. The storyteller is invariably answering questions such as who is responsible and who is to blame. Stories are often passionate and appear "unprofessional." Yet, they reveal that decisions are often made from personal experience or intuition rather than level headed technique and theory driven expertise. Technical expertise can be a way to hide the human dimension of stories (Baum, 1991). Narratives push professionals to become inquirers, researchers of their own practices.

Overt and covert stories of practice. There are overt stories which are direct and propositional accounts as well as more covert or latent stories found in the actions and vision of

life embodied in those actions. How willing people are to share stories of their work with others may depend on their organizational culture. Mattingly (1991) cites the World Bank as an organization in which work is carefully scrutinized by a distanced bureaucratic authority, and results in less sharing of information . Stories are kept from being told for fear of revealing one's own values, especially when personal values are in conflict with the espoused stance of the organization. Personal motivations are seen as irrelevant to superiors who are interested in results (and a more limited scope to things). The bureaucratic ethos of hard data and efficient use of resources, prevents some stories from being told and promotes other stories being falsely told. Organizational culture can restrict remembrance especially when remembering could endanger people.

What Novices Learn from Writing About Others' Story of Practice

The goal of writing a story of practice is to enhance the novice's learning the "how to" of practice. Through study of a specific case or problem, the beginner connects theory to practice. The story provides knowledge from formal and informal systems needed to make good decisions. This builds a bridge from novice to expert practice and enhances the ability to learn from experience. There is a change in how students appreciate stories as they move from the interviews, to transcripts, and finally, to the actual writing of the story. Students struggle with trying to capture the story completely. They express concern with maintaining the voice of the storyteller and struggle over whether to write stories in the first or third person. They have to address what makes for a good story, how not to bore the reader. Sharing the story with the teller is a higher standard than a course assignment or grade.

As the story takes form, students began to identify some of the differences between how they might have constructed the problem and how the experienced practitioner constructed the situation. This leads novices to consider their own values, their own choices in what to select as important in the story, and what seems peripheral. It allowed them to examine their own filters, or biases, in order to get a more complete understanding of what is important to them, and how this influences how they handle problems or specific situations. Thus, the exploration of a single story promotes movement to a more general understanding of how administrators act in everyday situations.

Richness of descriptions. The story allows the novice to listen to the inner thinking and dialogue of the practitioner. In part, the student hears the *reflection-on-action* (Schön, 1991) of a practicing administrator. The story is, by definition, a reconstruction of events which have already happened. As such, there is a reduction of complexity by the story teller. However, the novice is presented with a vocabulary and concepts, embedded in the story of practice, that later have to do with broader issues such as discipline, due process, safety, administrative decision making, etc.

Part of the learning asks about the extent to which the story captures not only the knowledge but the beliefs of the story teller. A story might begin with discussion of one's history or roots. This begins an exploration of the importance of values to administrative decision making, and differences between the practitioner's professional values and personal values (teamwork, honesty, and integrity). The personal characteristics and values that growing up and living in a small community, the importance of team participation and teamwork, become part of the administrative story of experience.

Recognizing complexity of personal and practical knowledge. Writing a story helps the writer to become more aware of his/her own experiences and more critical of underlying theories which inform this understanding of the world. The goal is for the writer is to look at alternative interpretations of the events, and what goes into crafting believable interpretations. In so doing, the writer begin to get a sense of his or her own standards concerning the credibility or believability of one explanation versus its alternatives. Rigor in the study of practice is to come up with or generate, compare, and discriminate among multiple representations of phenomena. The reflective person comes up with alternate causal stories and sees how well they can be refuted. This leads to a somewhat paradoxical stance: All stories are someone's constructions. Yet the story writer must strive to test these constructions by bringing to the surface and discriminating among alternate accounts.

Recognizing attributes or characteristics of leadership. Part of complexity is to recognize some of the characteristics or attributes that are commonly understood as leadership. This discussion of leadership encompasses not only attributes of people but also a variety of behaviors. Words and phrases from the add insights into what it means to be an effective leader in education.

Leadership and Expertise

Leaders deal with ambiguous conditions. The concept of *swampy* problems(Wagner, 1993) suggests that problems are:

- ill defined;
- formulated by one self;
- require additional information;
- have no single correct solution;
- involve multiple methods for obtaining multiple solutions;
- involve everyday experience as useful.

Experts apply tacit knowledge, a practical know-how that guides how problems are managed on an everyday basis.

Expertise is related to decision making processes. Experts adjust and modify their explanatory models as they come into contact with new and discrepant experiences. Glidewell (1993) points to several factors related to how CEOs change their minds: *celerity factors* (speed or haste of the proposed change), *background factors* (size, nature, competitiveness of organization) and *personal factors* (age, previously held beliefs, pragmatism, mood of the leader; resources at issue). The CEOs in the study organize or *compartmentalize* prior experience. The pressure for explanation leads to a basic change in conceptual framework and a modified mental model of what is going on and what needs to be done.

How do experts acquire their knowledge and skills that underlie problem solving? Drawing from Anderson (1990), Yekovich (1993) suggests that the acquisition of cognitive skill occurs in roughly three stages: In the *declarative stage,* an individual learns concepts and facts about the domain, and stores that information in memory as declarative knowledge. The declarative knowledge base is a very loosely and sparsely connected set of information; as more domain-related information is acquired, expertise is gained,. The *associative stage* is characterized by two noticeable changes in the knowledge state of the individual. There is growth in declarative knowledge and more importantly, organization and interconnectedness of knowledge changes to a more expert form. Continued development of the knowledge base allows one to associate facts and concepts with actions or operations in the domain. Associating facts with action is the beginning of domain-specific procedural or how-to knowledge. This allows for faster and more efficient processing of large chunks of domain specific declarative

(know about) knowledge. The *autonomous stage* is a fine tuning stage, increasing the elaboratedness and interconnectedness of the network. Fine tuning refers to generalization and discrimination to allow for an appropriate degree of generality or specificity; algorithms become more automatic (hence the autonomy). This happens without awareness, and uses few or no cognitive resources (Yekovich, 1993, pp. 151-153).

Allison and Allison (1993) look at differences in the problem solving strategies of novices and experts by comparing teachers acting in administrative roles, first year administrators, and veteran administrators. They report that direct experience in the role, even for a short period of time, appeared to enable subjects who pursued more abstract goals to provide increased attention to the details of the presented problems. Experience people are seen as further advanced concerning which details need attention. However, while the teachers handled many of the tasks well, as did the slightly more experienced first year administrators, some of the veteran administrators did less well on the problems presented to them. Allison and Allison (1993) caution that experience does not necessarily mean best practice.

Experts understand the relationship of problems to value systems. Problems and problem solving strategies are related to personal attitudes and beliefs. Organizations, especially schools, require people to work with others who have different life experiences. Serving a diverse population of students and parents, or collaborating with professionals from outside the organization, requires leaders to cross boundaries into the lives of other people. Value system shapes the conception of administrative problems as well as actions. Personal value systems influence the *selection* of the specific problems, the *interpretation* of selected problems, and the *solution* processes formulated consciously or subconsciously. Recent work on organizational

culture looks at how leaders *frame* problems that is, how they find the problems to which they attend (Bolman and Deal 1991; 1994),. Studies which focus on problem solving alone miss the complex and shifting human dynamics that are part of defining a problem. The capacity to look at the same events from multiple perspectives is a characteristic of expert leadership.

Personal values are sometimes seen in the discrepancy between what leaders say and what they do. Raun and Leithwood (1993) explain this as a discrepancy between "espoused theories" and "theories in use." While the CEOs in their study espoused basic human values and general moral values, when it came to practical applications, pragmatism and duty (instrumental values) emerge as more influential. They argue that administrators adopt a pragmatic perspective grounded in professional values, rather than relying on the more general moral values. While basic human and general moral values are important in response to context-free questions, there is a high degree of emphasis on professional and social/political values when CEOs address solving problems in the workplace. The domain of values deserves more explicit attention in preparation and training of educational leaders.

Administrator Stories

Ten administrators were interviewed, about biography and about administrative practice. These interviews were taped, transcribed, and turned into stories. These stories became the basis of discussion and reflection-on-action. Writing stories provided an opportunity for novices to participate in knowledge construction activities. The stories provided a much richer drama concerning the lives, hopes, failures, and successes of a group of practicing education leaders. The presentation of biography and selection of important topics was connected to constructs in the leadership domain. And there were many commonalities and similarities across the stories.

The interviewers and story writers, novice and prospective administrators, were able to hear about some of the gray areas in which administrators typically operate. These stories moved beyond simple recipes of practice, to a deeper level of understanding based on manifest and tacit information related in the stories. Also, the stories presented dilemmas that provide opportunities to generate interest and reflection.

There was a change in how students appreciated stories as they moved from the interviews, to transcripts, and finally, to the actual writing of the stories. Students struggled with trying to capture the story completely. The expressed concern with maintaining the voice of the stroyteller and the struggle over whether to write stories in the first or third person. They raised ethical questions concerning sharing of the *private lives* of the leaders, and how these related to the leadership story. Some students felt a unique bond or connection with the story teller and worried over violating what they considered to be personal trusts. More practically, others feared that these leaders may have inadvertantly revealed a part of themselves they would be less comfortable with later, and might negatively impact their future relations. And many of the leaders interviewed did choose to edit the written stories in significant ways after their telling.

As the story took written form, students began to identify some of the differences between how they might have constructed the problem and how the experienced person constructed the situation. This led novices to consider their own values, their own choices in what to select as important in the story and what seemed peripheral. It allowed students to examine their own filters and biases, in order to get a more complete understanding of what is important to them, and how this influences how they handle problems or specific situations.

Thus, the exploration of a single story allowed the student to move to a more general understanding of how leaders act in everyday situations, how they "walk what they talk."

High interest and drama do not necessarily improve everyday practice. Students were then asked to consider what makes for expertise, how to distinguish expert from non-expert performance, how experts excel and in which domains, how they perceive meaningful patterns, how fast they are, how deeply or at what principled level they move into problems, how they organize time to solve problems, and self-monitoring skills. The stories provide examples of some the key ingredients of action which are connected to discussion of theory, and presented in texts and supplemental readings.

One other consideration was whether there was a point to each of the stories, a synthesis position or a single perspective to each of the stories. Class discussion and presentation led to the realization that there were multiple ways to consider each story, and to interpret the significance of each of the stories. This led to the realization that every story has a counter story. Whether novices were comfortable with a single story or with multiple versions may have depended more on what they brought to the class than to their actual experiences. However, I believe the major result of the hearing, writing, and telling of the leadership stories was for novices to appreciate the multiple levels at which each of the stories could be explained and understood.

Background of the Story Tellers

Table 1 presents some background information about the ten administrators that participated in the project. As can be seen, they work in schools, higher education institutions, and government agencies and range from beginning administrators (1 year of experience) to more senior level practitioners (vice president with 22 years experience in the field). They were

all selected on the basis of availability, and potential opportunity for interviewers to establish (or extend) relations with someone in a superordinate position.

Table 1

Summary of Data About Administrators Selected for Interview

Case	Current Administrative Position	Gender of Administrator	Approximate Number of Years Experience Prior to Administration	Approximate Number of Years Administrative Experience
A	Principal, 9-12	Male	5-8	14 years
B	Principal and Vocational Director	Female	2 years teaching and 7 years as business consultant	22 years
C	County Educator/Agronomist	Male	20	5 years
D	Principal, 3-4	Female	14	3
E	Vice President	Male	5 years as R.A.	22 years
F	Dean	Male	12 years as professor and director of various human service programs.	8 years in current position.
G	State department of education director	Female	staff developer for 10 years;	1 year
H	Superintendent	Male	10 years	10 years
I	Staff Developer /Teacher	Female	10 years	1 year
J	State Department Director	Female	8 years	8 years

Many of the students used the assignment as a opportunity to establish or improve relations with an administrator in their own work environment. For seven of the ten stories, there was a gender match between novice and experienced administrator which may indicate comfort levels in approaching a superordinate.

Table 2 provides brief summary of some of the biography, key values, and critical incident expressed by the experienced administrators. These are presented to summarize some of the key aspects of the leadership stories. The full stories range in length from 10 to 20 pages and are available upon request..

Table 2

Elements of the Stories and Cases of Administrative Practice

Case	Professional Biography	Key Values Expressed	Critical Incident
A	Teacher, Central Office Administrator, Principal	Risk-taker and innovator; committed to students; lifelong learner	Passed over when district selected new assistant superintendent; made a decision to get experience as a principal.
B	Teacher, consultant, administrator	Risk taker, and valuer of relationships	Working with budget and negotiating teacher contract.
C	Farmer, Agronomist, Educator	Working knowledge of product, diversity, sincerity, detachment	Relocation, legislative action
D	Elem. Teacher, Gifted and Talented Director, Elementary Principal	Longevity, creative, committed to students learning	Accountability of students, teachers, parents and administration concerning standards-based education.
E	RA, Student Services, VP	Compassion, sensitivity, and commitment to student life	Importance of understanding culture of institution & politics
F	Teacher, Professor, Director, Dean	Respect for authority, Importance of self-knowledge, and professional connections	Having to deal with permanent disability of parent and accessing services led to career in human services rehabilitation
G	Special Education Teacher to state Department of Education and Staff Development	Righting injustice; Do what is right for people; empowerment.	Peer group mistreatment of special education student during school leads to education career.
H	History Teacher, Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent	Make education accessible to all students.	Success in turning around tough situations in schools.
I	Teacher, Staff Developer	Helping students become critical thinkers.	Taking on administrative position to work with teachers on staff development.
J	Parent, Speech Pathologist, State Government Administration	Collaboration, local autonomy with state accountability	Working with Education Goals Panel in Colorado.

A Sampler of Leadership Stories

What follows is a sampler of a few aspects of the leadership stories presented. Comments are taken from the writing and discussion of the stories. The leaders connected (implicitly and explicitly) their early life events to their leadership styles and practice. These snippets are helpful in getting a flavor of the leadership stories and some of the themes leaders thought were important enough to include in their stories of leadership and practice.

Leaders Shape and Affect Others' Perceptions

I started looking around and realized that I was really lonely. I wasn't part of an idealistic group any more that thought they could change the world. So I got really gutsy. I looked rich, but I was really poor, really broke. I always had a belief, in my background somewhere, that I could make a difference and the way I needed to make a difference in education.

Leaders Build Trust/Leaders are Sensitive to Others/Leaders Share Vision

There's a golden rule that I would live by, if you just treat other people the way you want to be treated. If you feel like being treated rudely, then you're going to treat other people rudely, and there isn't going to be a lot of respect. If you're respectful with other folks, and you're honest with other folks, by and large, you'll get that back.

I try to meet people where they're at - County fair, homeowners association, individuals, and trough a newsletter.

Catching the vision is an important thing around here, and it's important for our kids. Let me tell you about our kids. What we know about our kids is that if you were to open up their social tool kit, and reach inside, all they have inside is a hammer of anger. They are angry at their parents for getting divorced, or they are angry at the police or any power authority, or they're angry because they stopped being successful at school. They start dressing bizarrely, and their peers don't accept them, and they get awfully bizarre and they start swinging that hammer of anger around at everybody. Then they isolate themselves, and eventually start hitting themselves with that hammer of anger, and it begins to hurt, and then they try to get rid of the hurt by doing drugs and alcohol, and they hang with that crowd. That's the profile of the kid we deal with. So catching the vision is a major, major issue.

Leaders Empower Others by Leading Without Power.

My leadership style was nurtured there and I really learned how to lead without power. The curriculum division never had power, and I guess now that makes me unique as a principal, because we had to learn to nurture, to encourage, to be a catalyst and then step back and let the people who were in charge of implementing take credit for the work. That was a way of life. I learned an awful lot of negotiation skills. I believe I've empowered staff and students to carry out changes, and I've done that in several ways.

Leadership and Non-conformity

In many of the stories, there was a pattern of non-conformity throughout the person's professional career. The leader prided himself in being spontaneous, intuitive and risk-taking. From the beginning of his career, he sought out positions in schools that were out of the mainstream of public education, first in a reform school, than an inner city school, then back to a school in which the kids were considered "rough." When he relocated to a new state, he found a traditional teaching position, but quickly moved through the system (horizontally) to teach in a school in which the principal had a reputation of being a risk-taker and innovator. As he moved up the hierarchy into the central office position, he had established a reputation of being "radical." The challenge of taking on the leadership of a failing alternative high school fit the pattern of working in a school environment which was far from the norm.

Leaders as Explorers/ Leaders as Passionate and Committeed

Another story that emerged from the interviews was that of exploration. One leader had a huge appetite for knowledge. Learning was the number one priority for himself, his teachers and his students. Tremendous time and energy were spent exploring new ideas and in constantly renewing the vision of "what this school is about." There was a tendency shown by the leader to move into uncharted territory and make discoveries. Although he was willing to take successful ideas form other schools, the school staff was still encouraged to "put their spin on it." He prided himself at being on the cutting edge; of successfully implementing educational theory into practice. Although he had reached a certain measure of success and nationwide acclaim at the time of the interview, he was not content to rest on his laurels, but was continuing to seek out new ideas.

A commitment and passion for the work and for the mission of the school also emerged in the stories. One leader talked his school, its mission and his accomplishments. He expressed

commitment toward his staff and school. He made it clear that what he felt for his work went beyond professional obligations outlined in the contract. Having met all of his initial goals, he was setting new goals. What he had initially thought would be the end of his job (after completing his five year plan for the school) he now viewed as "only the beginning." It was in this school that he could reach out to teachers, parents and students in a way that had direct and meaningful impact on their lives. Many of the leaders interviewed expressed a passion for what they were doing.

Surprise at One's Success

One common thread among the leaders' stories was surprise at their own success. None of them identified themselves as being a child prodigy or even as being successful in their early school years. One of the leaders was successful in school, but seemed to dismiss it by saying she was surprised when she was recognized as an academic leader.

Importance of Finding a Mentor

The stories also illustrate the value of being mentored. When one of the principal's showed some interest in leadership, there were people there to help and guide her. Her superintendent and principal planted the seeds and gave her encouragement. She had some years of classroom experience and a directorship with the same school district, and she knew people. She earned respect and gave respect.

A Moral Basis for Educational Standards

One of the administrators was a strong proponent of standards-driven education because she believed it would help children, teachers and parents be more accountable for education. Standards define what it is that students should know and be able to do. She believed that at some point students will take school work more seriously because instead of the teacher being

responsible for students' learning, the students will be accountable for their own learning. She saw it as a team effort—students, teachers and parents all contributing to the child's education. As she explained:

I would describe standards-based education by simply saying, what is it that kids are able to do, what does it look like, and what do they have to do to perform so that it's proven they know how to do it? I've always thought that that's what education should be. I think my belief goes back to growing up in a very small school. There were twenty one in my graduating class, but it was an outstanding academic school. The school had competitive track and competitive volleyball for girls thirty years ago. In elementary school I was a lousy student, but by middle school and high school I'd learned how to talk my way through and get a B without too much effort. My English teacher wouldn't tolerate that level of competence. In her class, I always knew what was expected, the tests were never trick questions, and there was always some kind of product. We had class plays where everybody had a part. Everybody had to play in the band and you had to perform to get your chair. Once I got first chair in clarinet, I quit and played drums because I didn't have to work as hard and I could still go on all the band trips. I guess standards-based education is just being clear about what it is that you're supposed to learn.

Another administrator focused on some of the fears and challenges for teachers, parents, students, and the organization. For teachers, he felt that a major challenge was how to balance an education which builds resiliency in children with the fear that standards-driven education will hold them accountable for things out of their control. If fear reigns, then teachers will become more entrenched in textbook, lecture, testing, instead of opening up their teaching. Similarly, parents of struggling students may become fearful that standards-driven education will put additional stress on a child already having trouble in school. As academics is seen as more useful and applied, it will reduce anxieties. For students, the fear is that they won't be able to make the grade or get into college. For administrators, particularly those who have faced many challenges early on in their lives, there is concern for disenfranchised populations and whether more children will struggle instead of fewer, whether drop-out rate will increase or decline. The

challenge he suggests is " *to help the 37,000 general education teachers see that this helps kids reach high standards and it's not something different or separate. So that's my challenge.* "

Another administrator raised the issue of how standards-driven education defines expectations.

I think we have finally begun to understand that we have never really defined for kids what we expect of them, other than doing what the teachers tell them to do. It has always been teacher focused. Even in an integrated, whole language, holistic kind of classroom, I don't think kids really understand, even in a general sense what we expect of them, or why we are doing it, what the overall purpose is. My hope is that is what standards is going to do for us, because it is defined in what kids should know and be able to do. It will be assessed that way, and so they'd better know. I think it will help parents too, I hope it will.

She concludes with the hope that that standards-driven education will raise expectations of all — teachers, students, and parents — as people expect more of themselves.

CONCLUSION

Earlier we argued the importance of stories to understanding leadership. Gardner (1995) proposes that leaders are persons, who by word and/or personal example markedly influence the behaviors, thoughts, and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings. Leaders achieve effectiveness through the stories they relate. These stories reveal effectiveness in context. Each story has its own content, a certain level of sophistication of the story teller, and a value system that is embodied in the story.

There were many discoveries concerning biography, leadership and leadership development which came out of the stories. Some of the findings that came out of the stories included:

- People become leaders because they make choices (usually difficult at the time) to do something positive in their lives.
- None of the story tellers identified themselves as child prodigies; all were surprised at their success.

- Leaders identified a core set of values and beliefs by which they operate, which included caring, empathy, and humanism.
- Leaders talked about the culture of the organization, of constantly questioning the status quo, and working effectively with political leaders at all levels.

At early stages of their careers, those interviewed mentioned the importance of being mentored and following "rules of thumb". Experienced leaders better understood the complex set of actions and motivations embedded in practice rather than simple recipes to follow. Leadership combines abstract human thought, study, and practice; it is not as simple as mastering a handful of principles with near universal generality.

If university programs are to prepare people to perform their duties better than they have in the past, formal education will have to be expanded to include the experiences that have traditionally been available only on the job. Leadership develops as the result of "reflective skills," the ability to think more deeply about a problem, and to take action or make adjustments accordingly. Reflective practice implies not only that one has had experience, but that one has learned from it. The expert masters not only a knowledge base but understands the circumstances in which it is applied. This expertise cannot simply be learned from a theory; it relates to complex performances rather than discrete pieces of information. Building expertise through stories implies movement into new directions by learning the *how* of performance and action. The result is for novices to learn from the wisdom of practice while reflecting on the limits of experience.

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